

ON THE ALLELUJAH VICTORY, AND THE STATE OF ENGLAND  
IN THE FIFTH CENTURY.<sup>1</sup>

THE life of St. Germanus, Bishop of Auxerre, has claims upon our attention from his having visited Britain in the fifth century, and especially as archæologists engaged in investigating the early history of Cheshire, from the traditionary site of the Allelujah victory which he gained over the Saxons, being in close proximity to that county.

The town of Mold, near which this event is said to have happened, is within the ancient limits of Wales, but close to the English border; and before the two nations were united, must have been liable to the accidents to which such localities are constantly exposed. On the west of the town there is a remarkable hill, which has been strongly fortified, probably from a very early period. The character of the existing works is Norman, and the name, Bailey Hill, points to the same origin; but it is likely that a stronghold of a much earlier date existed here, and earth-works are so much alike, that between British, Saxon, Danish, and Norman, especially where succeeding races have enlarged and modified the works of their predecessors—who shall decide? Mold must always have been an important pass, as guarding one of the roads leading into the interior of Wales.

But this part of the history of Germanus is further noteworthy from the period at which his Life was written. His biographer, Constantius, a presbyter of Lyons, is the only contemporary writer who gives any authentic details of any transactions in this island in the fifth century,<sup>2</sup> and however small the harvest may be, a careful gleaner may still gather

<sup>1</sup> Communicated at the Annual Meeting of the Institute at Chester, July, 1857.

<sup>2</sup> Constantius is supposed to have

written his "Life of St. Germanus" about 490; it may be found in the "Acta Sanctorum," Bolland; as also that by Heric under July 31.

some things that become valuable, in proportion to the great rarity of historical materials for that important epoch of the world's history, when the Roman Empire was falling to pieces, to be reconstructed in a new political creation.

And these gleanings become of more consequence from the confusion that has arisen with reference to the inhabitants of Britain from the misunderstanding and ambiguity of the Latin names. It is certain that not one of the tribes or families named by Cæsar, Tacitus, or any of the Roman historians of the first three centuries can be identified, except the Kentish. It is only in the fourth century that we find the Saxones and the Littus Saxonicum corresponding with the later Essex, Middlesex, Sussex, and Wessex. In the following century we observe one or two other similar traces, and this remark applies not merely to the Eastern or Germanic part of the island, but equally so to the Welsh portion.

We may also notice that in Ammianus Marcellinus, Gildas, and Constantius, that is in the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries, the term *Britanni* or *Britones* is not applied to the inhabitants of the island generally, but to the Roman party only, which included the owners of property, the cities and municipal towns, and in fact comprehended the wealth, intelligence, organisation, and the political, if not the physical, power of the community. The other, or what we might name the national party, are called *Barbari*.<sup>3</sup>

The earliest notice of the expedition of St. Germanus into Britain is found in the Chronicle of Prosper of Aquitaine, which is a continuation of that of St. Jerome, comes down to 455, and may be supposed to have been written five or six years after the death of Germanus. Prosper tells us, that "in the Consulship of Florentius and Dionysius (A. D. 429), Agricola Pelagianus, the son of Severianus

<sup>3</sup> See Bede, lib. i. cap. 12 et seq. The Roman party termed *Britones* by him, asked for, and got help from the Romans in 414 and 416, against the *Barbari*, who certainly were not Welsh or Gaelic. The contests, as might be expected, were waged with various success; but about the middle of the Vth century the Roman party had actually acquired the ascendancy, when dissensions broke out among themselves. The arrival of leaders from the continent afforded a

point of union, hitherto wanting, to the *Sexna*, and the revolution may be said to have commenced from that period. It is curious that some cities retained their freedom and possessions through all the changes both then and subsequently, and little doubt can be entertained, that both London and York exhibit traces of the original municipal institutions of *Londinium* and *Eboracum*. Chester itself may be added to this list.

a Pelagian bishop, corrupted the Churches of Britain by insidious teaching ; but the Pope Celestinus, by the inducement of Palladius, a deacon, sent Germanus, the Bishop of Auxerre, as his representative, by whom the heretics were put to the rout, and the Britons were turned to the Catholic Faith." <sup>4</sup>

Doubts have been thrown upon the genuineness of this statement, and as neither Constantius nor Beda (who quotes Prosper) says anything about Celestinus, this part may have been interpolated ; but there is no reason to question the date itself. Germanus, however, is stated to have come over a second time, shortly before his death, which took place in 449.

When the Pelagian heresy reached Britain, Constantius tells us that a deputation was sent to the Gallican bishops to request their help in defence of the Catholic Faith ; that a large synod met, and that Germanus and Lupus were chosen to put down the growing evil. After escaping a violent storm in the voyage, they were received by a number of priests from all parts. They preached not only in the churches, but in the streets of cities, and in country lanes. At first the Pelagians are said to have hid themselves ; but not wishing the people to escape out of their hands, they at length determined to face the new apostles. They advanced to the conflict conspicuous for their wealth, in shining robes, and surrounded by troops of flatterers. After a public disputation, in which all the arguments, eloquence, and triumph are attributed to the bishops, the assembly, as judge, with difficulty held their hands, and expressed their opinion with a shout. At this moment a certain person of Tribunitian authority, with his wife, brought his blind daughter, ten years old, to test the truth of the contending parties by their miraculous powers. The Pelagians declining this proof, Germanus took a small box of relics from his neck and applied it with prayers to the child's eyes, who immediately recovered her sight, and the conviction was complete ; the heresy was put down, its supporters confuted, and the minds of the people settled in the pure faith. The Gallican bishops visited the Martyr St. Alban, and returned thanks to God through him. Germanus had the tomb

<sup>4</sup> "Mon. Historica Brit." p. lxxxi.

opened, and deposited therein many relics of other saints collected in various countries. He also took some of the soil where the blood of the saint was shed and which it yet contained ; and as the conclusion of these events, it is said, innumerable men were the same day turned to the Lord.

On his return, Germanus having injured his foot, was obliged to stop in a cottage ; a fire took place, and in spite of every effort, the village was consumed ; the house where the Saint remained alone escaping. After the application of various remedies without effect, at last the injured limb was miraculously healed.

In the meantime the Saxons and Picts had joined their forces and made war upon the Britons, who entrenched themselves, but fearing that their troops were inferior to the enemy, they sought the help of the holy bishops. Their early arrival inspired the Britons with as much confidence as if they had been reinforced by a very large army. It was the season of Lent, and impelled by the daily sermons, the people hastened to be baptised. A church was built of green branches on Easter Sunday, and gave the appearance of a city to the rural encampment. The newly baptised converts with fervent faith, distrusting the mere protection of arms, awaited the divine help. The enemy, who had heard of this ceremony, presuming upon an easy prey, rapidly advanced ; Germanus, when the services of Easter day were over, was informed of their approach, and undertook the duties of general. He disposed his enthusiastic followers on the sides of a valley, amidst mountains, through which the enemy would have to pass, and notice of their advance was given by scouts placed for the purpose ; the Saint ordered his troops to repeat aloud thrice, the word "Allelujah !" when he gave the signal. The mountains re-echoed the shout, and the Saxons, who calculated on surprising the Britons, were themselves struck with terror. They fled, throwing away their arms, and some even, overcome with fear, were drowned in crossing the river. The Christian army beheld the discomfiture of its enemies, as idle spectators of the victory thus won. They gathered the spoils, and the bishops rejoiced in a bloodless conquest gained by faith, not by strength.

The security of the island both as far as visible and invi-

sible foes were concerned was obtained, and Germanus and Lupus returned safely to Gaul.<sup>5</sup>

I have endeavoured to render as accurately as possible, the language of Constantius, which is the more necessary as later writers have exaggerated his statements for the purpose of enhancing the supposed miracle. There is nothing in the narrative to indicate the spot where this defeat took place ; but tradition has assigned to it a valley, still called Maes Garmon, the field of Germanus, about twelve miles from Chester. The town of Mold may be considered as forming the foreground of the first range of Welsh mountains ; it is built on the slope of a hill terminated by the church, immediately to the west of which is the Bailey Hill already mentioned. Beyond this is a valley more than half a mile across, which is closed on the opposite side by a steep ridge : here is a monument—an obelisk erected in 1736, in memory of the battle. The valley opens on the right to the river Alyn ; to the south it descends to the Maes Garmon, at a farm-house, and is continuous with another narrow valley from the south-east. If we suppose a heedless body of Saxons coming along this valley, the head of it having reached the parallel of the present monument, and concealed detachments of the disciples of St. Germanus placed along the broken sides of the hills, raising the shout and exhibiting their arms, we may easily conceive that the enemy fancied themselves surrounded by a superior force, and, seized with a panic, fled into the open country to the north, crossing the Alyn. Constantius does not say that many lost their lives ; but if the river was flooded, it is possible that some might perish there. It was probably nothing more than a predatory inroad, such as was frequently made in later times, in which victory brought little gain or glory, and defeat as little loss or disgrace.

We may here allude to the practice of the early Church in celebrating baptism at Easter ; and as nothing is said by Constantius respecting the difference between the Roman and British Churches, we may imagine that Germanus and Lupus themselves used the Eastern form of computation.

<sup>5</sup> "Bed. Hist. Eccl." lib. i. cap. 17 et seq. Beda never names Constantius: the various readings may be seen in the

"Monumenta Historica Brit.," p. 122, et seq.

Where Germanus landed, or in what part of the country he preached, the Life does not tell us. The only locality named is that of Verulam, the scene of the death of St. Alban, so graphically described by Beda; and whether the bishop went there at once, as conjectured, or whether the assembly where the tribune's daughter was healed took place elsewhere, and the visit to St. Alban's was made later, we have too little evidence to decide. The battle is said to have occurred on Easter Sunday—but it would be according to the Eastern calculation, and we have now to draw our conclusions as to the condition of the country in the second quarter of the fifth century as carefully as we can.

Resistance to the Romans had begun at least eighty years before; and though rebellions had been repeatedly put down, the outbreaks were again and again renewed. The troops were wanted elsewhere, and were gradually withdrawn from the island, till at length in 409 the Emperor Honorius wrote letters to the cities of Britain, telling them they must look to their own safety.<sup>6</sup> At the beginning of the fifth century religious discord was very rife among the British Christians, and there was a powerful heathen party, the Barbari, who seem to have assumed the name of Picts—and were soon to predominate. The political factions also were striving, not merely for present power, but for life, for freedom, and for the whole property of the country; one relying on present possession and organisation, the other on numbers and national rights, and with altogether different laws relating to property itself. Constantius names only two political parties, the Saxons and the Picts; but these possibly represent the two great divisions of a later period, the Saxons and the English. The Saxons were undoubtedly the the *Sexe* or *Sexna* who held the *Littus Saxonicum* under the Lower Empire, forty or fifty years before, and whose name Latinised into *Saxones* was confounded with the *Sachsen* of the continent, and seems even then to have been applied by the Welsh to the English generally.<sup>7</sup>

The Picts on the other hand were not any particular tribe or family, but a political confederation or party, which, about

<sup>6</sup> Zosimus, lib. vi. cap. 10.

<sup>7</sup> The later historians, when writing in Latin, apply the word *Saxones* to the in-

habitants of England, while the native writers, using their own language, even from the first call them English.



the middle of the previous century, rose against the Roman government, and after years of hard struggling achieved their freedom and merged in their original tribes, to maintain a stormy and less prosperous independence. These were all of Germanic origin, and had nothing but the innate love of liberty and their own valour wherewith to contend against the wealth, organisation, and *prestige* of the Roman party. It was, in fact, as we may gather from the letter of Honorius, country against town, and at the time when Germanus came over, it would seem that the city of Verulam was still independent.

We may notice another fact of importance, that no mention is made of any king or general, and the divided state of the country accounts for this circumstance. The mention of a person of Tribunitian authority points to a municipal government, and the advice of the Emperor "to the cities of Britain" serves to show that each was independent of the others. Twenty or thirty years later we have Kings of Kent, then Kings of Sussex, and Wessex, and in the following century Gildas names Kings of Devonshire, and North Wales. Many of the cities were probably by that time destroyed; the Roman party was subdued; the heathen triumphant, and possibly Stonehenge may be a memorial of the newly recovered nationality commenced upon a magnificent scale, and never completed.

The country through which Germanus passed, appears to have been entirely under the Roman party, as there is no allusion to any other religious enemy than the Pelagians, who appear to have been of the higher and wealthier classes. In the interval of the twenty years which had elapsed from the letters of Honorius, communications were kept up with Rome, and applications for assistance made, as described by Gildas. Twenty years later it was sought in vain; district after district assumed its independence and received their so-called kings from the fatherland of their race. Indeed, the statement of Adam of Bremen,<sup>s</sup> who quotes perchance some lost classic authority, is in all probability literally true, viz., that the Saxons of the continent came from Britain. If some of the Sexe of our island took refuge on the barren islands and shores at the mouth of the Elbe in the first and second

<sup>s</sup> He quotes Einhardus, who had Tacitus before him.—*Hist. Eccles.* lib. i. cap. 4.

centuries, from their Roman conquerors, they would of necessity support themselves by attacks upon the more civilised settlements about them, and the royal races might be continued and known amongst them. There will thus be no difficulty in receiving the history of the establishment of the various Anglo-Saxon kingdoms as given in Bede and the Saxon Chronicle.

There is one more point to be noted, with reference to the Saxons and their piratical attacks upon their wealthy neighbours. The Sexes never were a sea-going race, except from absolute necessity. Cæsar when he invaded the island does not appear to have seen a vessel of any sort; the previous reports of the assistance the Britons had given to the Gauls, if true, must refer to the Cornish Britons. After the defeat of the Romans, the intercourse with the continent was not frequent, except perhaps with Rome. Alfred from necessity raised a fleet, but his successors did not keep it up; nor was it till England and Normandy were one kingdom, that any permanent British navy was established.

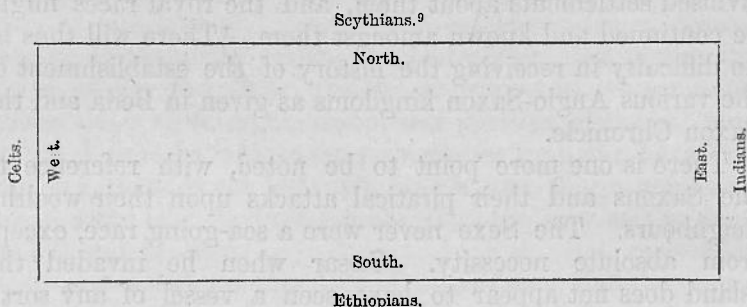
The tribes on the west side of the kingdom, including Cornwall and Wales, were of a different race, which has been named Celtic—an objectionable name, and which should be either strictly defined or abandoned altogether. It may be applied to any people speaking a cognate language with the Welsh, but not to races using a Latin dialect, and still less to those of purely Teutonic origin.

It may here be allowed to add a few words upon this important subject. Every one who has had occasion to examine the Geography of the ancients, knows how little it is to be depended on, whether as regards the relative position of places, or the names assigned to them. With little knowledge of science—with less of strange languages—none of which, in this portion of the globe had been reduced to writing, and with few voyagers whose accounts could be trusted, we may be surprised that they have done so much; but evidence merely collected from their compilations is of the most unsatisfactory kind.

Ephorus, a Greek historian, flourished 341 years before Christ, or about 140 years after Herodotus. In order to systematise Geography, he assumed that the habitable world was a parallelogram and thus arranged all those who dwelt



outside of those nations with whom the Greeks had intercourse, or where they had colonies :—



Now, as nobody would attempt to identify the Scythians or Indians, or even the Ethiopians, with any existing race, these names in fact comprehending all the unknown tribes which peopled immense divisions of the habitable globe, it is not easy to see why the Celts should have formed the only exception. Herodotus is the earliest author who mentions them, merely however as a tribe, dwelling to the west of the Phocæan colony of Massilia, and they are never named again as an individual family or people. Later writers, it is true, applied the term to the Gauls, from some supposed etymological affinity between Galatæ and Celtæ; and Cæsar divided Gaul into three parts, one of which he called Gallia Celtica. But it must always be borne in mind that these groupings of various districts and tribes into one large province, are comparatively of late date, and are altogether arbitrary. Still later writers have regarded even the Scandinavians as Celts, and it seems to be a prevalent opinion that a figurative wave of Celts at some unknown period flowed up from the East, till they were stopped by the real waves of the Atlantic in the West. It is quite time to put an end to what I fear must be called idle fancies; let us accept the divisions of Europe as they are already defined by language. In the western part we have only three such families, the Cymric, the Latin, and the Scandinavian—all clearly distinct dialects, and all as clearly from the same original tongue, each, too, marking its own unmistakable boundary by the

<sup>9</sup> See "Geographia Antiqua," edited by J. Gronovius, at the end. Lugd. Bat. 1700. "Fragmens des Poèmes Geogra-

phiques," par Latronne. Paris, 1840, p. 146.

names of places, which further are characteristic of the sub-dialects ; these sub-dialects themselves, however, having become independent languages long before any existing history.

The miracles and events respecting St. Germanus in the compilation of Nennius (who says nothing of the Battle of Mold), are altogether of a different character to those given by Constantius. Part seems to be taken from a *Life of Germanus*, by Heric, written in the ninth century, who gives as his authority Marcus Anchorita, a British monk ; and part may be derived from the effusions of the Welsh Bards of a still later date. The former relate to a certain Benli, the Lord of Ial or Durnluc, described as a tyrant and usurper, and who is compelled by the Saint to resign his power and possessions to one Ketel or Catell : in the latter portions we are introduced to King Guorthigern and Ambrosius, and though the whole might find a place in the *Mabinogion*, it has nothing to do with history. The only reference that can be made to it, is that in the ninth century the localities connected with St. Germanus in Wales are in the immediate neighbourhood of Mold. The district of Ial or Yale is said to have extended from Corwen to Mold, and four or five miles from the latter we have a hill-fort called the Castle of Benlli.

Constantius describes a second journey of Germanus, the events of which are of the same character as those of the first. The heresy was again spreading ; there was another invitation for help ; Severus, a disciple of Lupus, was joined with Germanus in the mission ; the bishops are told that few are really to blame, and these they find out and condemn. A certain Elafius, one of the chief men of that district, hastened with his son who had lost the use of his limbs, to meet them : the youth is restored to his health, the people are filled with wonder at the miracle, and the Catholic Faith is firmly established in the breasts of all. By the general voice the authors of the heresy being expelled from the island, were given up to the priests to be conveyed to the continent, that the country might be freed from them, and they themselves have a chance of amendment.

Thus even in 447—for as Germanus is represented as proceeding from Britain to Ravenna, and there dying in 449, it could hardly have been earlier—we find much the same

state of things in the part of the island which he visited, as in his former journey.

I have now endeavoured to give a fair representation of the narrative of Constantius, whose Life of St. Germanus has been freely used, but not named by Beda in the first book of his History. However meagre the details, the account is by far the most valuable we possess of the time, the evidence being much more trustworthy than the legends of two or three centuries after. We can only hope to have made the best use of our materials, and to have succeeded in throwing some light upon the early history of our country.

JOHN ROBSON, M.D.